

The Cultural Collaborative: A Community Plan for San Antonio's Creative Economy

TCC Executive Committee Meeting: May 5, 2004

Summary Discussion:

The primary goal of this Committee meeting was to further discuss the draft TCC Vision Statement and the newly added planning issue of cultural equity. The Committee agreed to add Cultural Equity as a ninth TCC focus area.

Pablo Martinez, TCC professional consulting team member, explains the concept and importance of cultural equity below in the paragraphs written below.

To begin working toward the goal of cultural equity, present-day realities, as well as historical facts, must be carefully considered. Cultural equity, then, is something to which San Antonio aspires—it cannot be a blithely made assumption.

Just as certain forms of equity between individuals are founded on an abiding belief in the dignity and worth of every individual, so too must equity between and among groups of individuals whose work addresses cultural expressions recognize, value, respect, and support diverse expressions with fairness, sensitivity, and understanding.

Cultural equity also implies a fair distribution of resources, not only to artists and arts organizations (i.e., for the not-for-profit sector of a creative economy), but also to the communities they serve and in which they reside. This aspect of cultural equity helps insure that what is fair and right is compellingly evinced in equal access and widespread cultural participation.

Given the constantly evolving nature of culture (here broadly defined), it follows that cultural equity must be constantly championed and protected, the same as any other basic right, tenet, or resource.

Through a vigorous affirmation of cultural equity, San Antonio would boldly demonstrate a keen, fair, and forward-looking vision for cultural expressions, their sources, and their support systems, the critical bedrock of all creative environments.

Discussion of Focus Areas:

Neighborhood Revitalization:

- Forward looking, not revitalize, but look at as vitalized communities, what exists and aspirations
- Increasing communication around the arts, interaction, cross pollinate
- Identify artists in the neighborhoods; get involved
- Culture doesn't limit us to art, refer to culture of the hood, history was much more communication among neighbors, "convivencia" as a value
- Assuming there is no art in the neighborhoods, it is available through schools, just not communicating with each other, resources lacking

Arts and Culture in Education:

- Need to add values
- Does Advocacy and outreach address this?
- Idea of revitalizing neighborhoods thru arts occurs at an advanced level of development after other needs are met (symphony in every neighborhood?) Neighborhood revitalization is secondary in terms of vision statement, are all eight focus groups coequal?
- Impact code and tax incentives to create a structure and process that encourages opening arts to community benefit
- Revitalization of open space, encourage people to get out, put something more aesthetic vs. metal roof, etc.
- Plan must distinguish between what arts are doing, what can we recommend that will produce a product - difficult if we try to mesh other needs that may belong in planning
- We need to realize all these statements support San Antonio; vision, strategies and actions come later
- Facilitator for education, utilize arts and cultural groups in classrooms to inform the curriculum, begs for collaborative efforts
- Collaboration is used only once in vision statement
- Schools and universities, but also include problem of education of the broader public on the arts, periods where people go against the arts show whether we cultivate support for all the arts; politicians retreat to public outcry against public arts, etc. (lifelong learning)
- Politicians are the ones who say arts in education is bad, not the people, but the political organizations run the schools
- Cultural organizations have come to schools to partner; it should be the culture of the school to support arts and culture
- Use of the word institutions, do all organizations consider themselves to be institutions?
- Language puts burden on the arts organizations, not vice versa; tweak language so it goes back to the schools, (true equitable partnership)
- There is a lot of hostility to arts, educate school boards on value of arts, so that they understand the importance of visual literacy
- I wouldn't shy away from word "institution" – it shows how we perceive ourselves, self-validation, adds to the way school boards see us

Creative Individuals:

- Use language that supports, develops, and strengthens the youth: Say Sí, others
- "Creative Individuals" as a concept is not hitting on the mark, not very revealing. Develop a concept of what we are trying to say, maybe articulate what is included
- Developing support and infrastructure in youth, but hope it would be for all of our citizens, not just artists, but within the city
- Add creative language throughout other areas. We should recognize creativity also. Other areas speak to the general public, this area has to be about creative individuals
- Per Richard Florida, we need language somewhere re creative economy
- Creative environment, creative class from economic development perspective

- Creative ecosystem vs. economy
- Creative environment - environment that attracts individuals, not just residents
- Important to incorporate the use of existing institutions, utilize them to the maximum, reaching to broader community

Advocacy and Outreach:

- Who do we want doing this? Do we want an entity (i.e. OCA) doing this in the future? Who's doing it? Rework-what it is and who is doing it.
- We are all doing this! Legislature needs to recognize arts
- Have to get to the elective officials, who coordinates this? Tourism
- We are all advocates, ambassadors
- Broader than politicians
- Structural problem, this is a vision statement, not a strategy
- PTA is an advocacy agency, bring them into the arts circle
- Through audience, vs. community, so they can be the advocates
- Tourism Council - several committees need to get together, cutting budgets in tourism areas - coordinate with other committees for connections
- Advocacy - if you give people the opportunities to practice arts and culture, that is going to be the advocacy - underscore the community aspect

Tourism:

- Create a buzz about how tourism will benefit from arts and culture, affirming growing the arts and cultural community is the vitality of city; wording; recognize and emphasizes the creative growth in the cultural sector
- LA Lakers Coach Phil Jackson said, "If you've been in San Antonio once, why return, you've done it." He left the door open to come in proactively to advocate for what we have
- Marketing of the other things that we have and do, tourism will flow, effectively marketing the other plans
- I want the word to change to indentured servitude - is this what we are supporting?
- Water beneath us, conserving the culture that brings people here, preserving and enhancing, advocating in a positive way, the reason people come
- Not just downtown culture for tourism, our kids can't come downtown, need to talk about culture, use Mexican culture, need to respect and recognize those who practice this everyday
- The vision statement recognizes that. People are drawn here due to culture.
- One-third of the people who visit SAMA are from Mexico
- Need to say something about preservation of culture, can become superficial, add creative environment
- Artists perform at the theme parks

Resources:

- Play with idea of changing Culture and Arts, interchange every once in a while throughout the wording

Arts and cultural Infrastructure:

- How proactive? We let venues disintegrate; wording doesn't communicate commitment to maintenance and upkeep
- Art work has to be maintained and restored, doesn't look good, needs to come from private sector as well as the city, communicates respect, maintain or well-maintained keeps the spirit of what we want to communicate

Civic Aesthetics/Public Art:

- Mindset is that we have to be very conservative, need for education. "Weaving art into the tapestry...." may not resonate with Public Works. How is it working in the city?
- Should be broader and involve private sector, this is where people "design sector and incentives"
- Needs outstanding, rev up language
- How do we determine civic aesthetics and public art; by what standards?
- That is where it is important for us to say "we are the best"
- Public art should reflect and preserve culture, doesn't exclude art from elsewhere, and also articulates the indigenous culture
- Advocate for historical preservation - lack of connection with importance of history - same zeal for the cultural spaces, not just public art
- Two distinctions: don't want to lose historical but don't want to limit the new, evolving, creative. These add to economy. Do not eliminate either one.
- Recognize what we have and not destroy it
- Represent diversity of culture

Discussion of Cultural Equity:

David Plettner asked the Committee, "What does cultural equity mean to you?"

Answers/Comments:

- Combined experience of a group of people, agree with cultural relevance, biggest error is that people think it is for those on the outside, not us

David Plettner asked the Committee, "Do you consider your definition of culture to be broad?"

- All agree it is broad
- Expression and reflection of values
- Expression of traditions
- Way of life
- Responsible for tradition, but also for invention
- David Plettner: balance historical roots, with innovative forward moving city - the most unique aspect of TCC]
- Saving a culture and adding to it. Not mutually exclusive, but there is a class reference, respecting all places. Respect those cultures that have been kept in place
- David Plettner: spectrum and diversity
- Equality, investment in
- The asset of culture is greater than the liability, build the equity
- May need to pay more attention to get everyone there

- Bothering me, art as the discipline of art, culture a group of people with certain values, as if we are putting an exclusive status “cultured”
- Perception that opera is elite, not hierarchy because of background or skin color is racist, equity eliminates all this
- Not think about hierarchy?
- Two different ideas of culture - 20 different cultures in the city - anything that makes a creative statement, as opposed to an art form, confluence of all people is an unique blending, creative vibrancy in one location
- Two different words, every culture has artistic relevance
- Artist, brought my culture to the arts, Italian, after education in art
- Difference between arts and culture, becomes the context to interpret, culture precedes art and gives it its meaning, kind of a dichotomy
- Culture in broadest sense - violence, erasure, war, historically, missions to military - culture of love respect and sharing, values - clash in SA and the world - must reflect this, history must be included in the plan
- Hierarchy and turning it, eliminate “high and low”
- The lasting good of society
- Social justice, etc., that takes the form of art, art is a tool for expression, for TCC it is a form
- Cultural Collaborative – arts and cultural are not separated
- Is this plan specifically guided by how the City wants to allocate its money? [No.]
- Important to acknowledge that art comes out of culture, and culture informs art. It’s an iterative thing
- Expansive notion?
- Tourism tax vs. funds from other sources
- Culture is part of our life as we experience it today, area of judgment, how we think of good vs. bad where we have trouble - elected officials and general public
- Felix Padrón: TCC is an inclusive process. The community will have its own definition of culture. Equity as a focus area - diversity - is there cultural equity? Perhaps not, and not necessarily about funding, then it becomes an issue of advocacy and outreach. It needs to be tangible.
- A symphony that is supported, very little opera and ballet. We’re not going in the direction I thought we were.
- Don’t think there is a lot of competition between, but limited opportunities and everyone must compete for funds. There are not enough opportunities for everyone to feel they are on equal footing
- Diversity, opportunity and access
- Agree population has changed, diverse, acknowledging and accepting that 60% of culture in this city is Mexican-Americans
- In the arts we have the greatest degree of equity. In the arts there is a demonstration of cultural equity, which is more possible than in other sectors. Need to build on this strength.
- Are we talking about equity in funding? We need to be careful, if so, because amount of money needed may be different for symphony vs. a dance group
- Equity doesn’t mean equality, pay more attention to sectors that have been neglected for years, committee addressing the symphony, attitude and commitment on city as a whole, think beyond dollars, leadership in both civic and business community

- Broader sense, connections between all, schools – lawsuit - Robin Hood – taxed more for poor communities - drop out rates - affect long term educated folks to direct the museums, health problems - tax abatements - for jobs, what kind of jobs?
- Funding - need to talk about it, how you support institutions and artists in the community. They can't grow and develop without it.
- Felix Padrón: "nonprofit" community - professional equity - arts not recognized as a professional industry - cultural industry - raise the bar - think of ourselves having greater value
- Value equals dollars - institutions valued have more money appropriated to them
- We are in agreement that we must value ourselves
- Arts sit above community - must talk to community
- Artists have kept arts alive. Assume people understand the value, when in fact it is devalued.
- Felix Padrón: South Flores - private sector - Benavidez, Gallista - nonprofits, more money, private efforts - both have contributed
- Don't focus on money
- Cultural preservation - should emphasize in our vision, in the arts, cultures are preserved, expressed and preserved, arts where attention is given, new and historic
- David Plettner: broad, value and preserve, arts as a tool for cultural equity
- Culture of diversity - prided ourselves on this, arts are the greatest freedom of expression and ought to be the way we understand each other's culture. It should lead us to a community we are proud of. Every art has a relatively narrow basis, problem - one form is identified with Anglo, expensive, expression of art is very differential, symphony, limited audience

Committee agreement: To add as cultural equity as 9th planning issue

3. Wrap-Up and Next Steps:

The consultants will revise the vision statement in line with the Committee's discussion, prepare a draft cultural equity statement, and circulate both to the Committee.

The six TCC community forums will be held beginning in June at locations throughout the city. All committee members are encouraged to attend the forums.